

Noisy Beds

Era: circa 1990

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"This is a very delicate subject. Once I've explained, you'll understand. The whole family is upset - even the cat."

Mooch indicated agreement by licking his paws and rubbing his whiskered cheeks, then he stretched like a rubber band down the length of the coffee table. He tipped over my coffee cup. Mrs. Neill rescued it before it dropped to the floor and she sighed.

A clatter of pots and pans came from the kitchen. Mary Neill's three year old daughter was building high rise towers.

"I can see that, Mary, but I can't do anything about it until I know what's going on."

"Noise, Lois. That's what's going on - every Saturday night. Two o'clock in the morning." She pointed to the flower-pink wall that separated her unit from the unit I was renting to Mr. and Mrs. Eriksson.

Jake, the real estate agent had found the ideal investment for me. With the purchase of a sixplex in Forest Grove, I had gained a place to live and all the shopping I could wish for. There was one small problem, however.

Anxiously, I studied my two and a half-inch heels - wondered if I could get away gracefully. Probably I couldn't - shoes and conversation considered. Being a landlord could be a pain in the derriere, especially if you rented your units to people.

Silently, I considered turning the sixplex into a kennel.

Marcy beetled in from the kitchen. "Mommy, Mommy." She poked her mother with a dimpled hand.

"Not now, Marcy." Mrs. Neill buried her daughter's fingers between her own.

"Are the Erikssons having a lot of parties then?" I asked.

"Parties? Well you might call them that, though I probably wouldn't, since nobody's there except the two of them. Not a party. More like... well..."

She glanced in distress at her daughter who took advantage of the attention to lean across the woman's knee and shout loudly, "Cookie, Mommy." Her legs lifted up and swept across the coffee table, sliding my empty cup into Mooch's face. He shook his whiskers, eyed the child's bare legs with disdain, then moved to a safer spot - the top of the kitchen table - barely visible from the living room.

"What kind of noises are you hearing?"

"A lot of groans, and squeals and shouts ... I don't know what you'd call them. Maybe I should phone you next Saturday when it happens and you could come over and hear for yourself."

"At two in the morning? I don't think so. I have to be up early on Sunday to clean my apartment because afterward I go shopping. Do you suppose they're fighting, then?"

"Oh no... not ... fighting."

"Because if they are ..."

Marcy stuck her face right next to her mother's. "Making whoopee, Daddy says. Right, Mommy?"

"Marcy. You hear too much for your own good." Mrs. Neill tousled Marcy's hair.

"What's making whoopee, Mommy?"

"Wouldn't you like to watch TV for a few minutes?"

"I want a cookie." Marcy headed for the kitchen.

Mrs. Neill waited until her daughter was around the corner, then leaned closer, "I wouldn't mind the noise," she continued, "except for Marcy. Her bedroom backs against their unit and she keeps asking me questions - like why do people squeal and laugh in the middle of the night. Tim and I might have to trade bedrooms with her. And Marcy's bedroom is so tiny that the Erikssons might be the only one's making... well, it's just too tiny."

"Yes, I see. Couldn't you trade bedrooms just for Saturday nights?"

"What do you want us to do? Sleep on Marcy's bed? There's no room in that bedroom. Even to swing a cat."

Mooch looked up, started meowing plaintively.

"Oh be quiet, Mooch. What I mean is Tim and I can't fit in Marcy's bed."

There was a loud crash from the kitchen, a stunned silence, then a howl like I've heard once or twice before from a cat in heat. Mooch was still sitting in the middle of the kitchen table - startled but certainly not caterwauling. Mrs. Neill jumped from the sofa and disappeared into the kitchen. I followed her.

A moment later she was making gentle clucking noises from the centre of a heap of cookie crumbs, broken glass, and wild sobs.

"Yes well, thank-you very much for the rent cheque, Mary, and I'll see what I can do about your problem. No need to come to the door. I'll just let myself out."

Mrs. Neill looked up from the bundle of grimy sobs that she cradled in her arms and smiled happily.

"Don't let Mooch out," she called as I went down the stairs. "He forgets this is where he lives."

It was the evening of the following day before I screwed up the courage to talk to the Erikssons. I put on a pair of sneakers before I left my unit. No high-heeled shoes this time. Grace comes on little flat feet.

Inside the Erikssons' apartment, Mooch stood at the top of the stairs, surveying me and the doorstep through the screen.

Mrs. Eriksson answered my ring. On the way down the stairs, her housecoat swept across the cat's fur. He had built-in radar, and he dished his back like a skipping rope to avoid the housecoat.

"Hello, Lois," the Scandinavian blond responded in a heavy accent.

Mooch plucked a butterfly out of the corner where he stood, then sauntered down the stairs and plopped it between us. Its wings were still fluttering.

Mrs. Eriksson eyed him suspiciously. "Mooch, you're a cruel cat. No food for you."

"He eats here, too, hey?"

She smiled. "I assume you're after the rent cheque."

In spite of an overhead ceiling light that cast harsh shadows, Mrs. Eriksson was flower-fresh. Her housecoat lolled revealingly beneath her throat and gripped an hour-glass waist. I wondered how many shopping trips it would take for me to look that glamorous.

"The rent. Yep. How did you know?"

She laughed then climbed to her kitchen, trailing folds of cloth behind her, a hint of bare leg in front. Mooch stepped aside disdainfully.

The butterfly was making me feel distinctly uncomfortable so I scooped it up and sat it on the light fixture just outside the door.

Mooch meowed loudly. "Just a minute you noisy thing," Mrs. Eriksson hollered, "and I'll get you a dish of salmon."

I waited patiently, trying to figure out how I was going to ask the Erikssons to tone down their Saturday nights. I could hear Mrs. Eriksson chattering to someone, probably her husband, as she searched for her purse, wrote out the cheque and tripped back down the stairs. "Here you go. I was going to bring it to you tonight but I forgot all about it until I took my clothes off."

"That's fine. I needed to talk to you anyway."

"Problem?" Her eyes were a tropical blue, deep and rich, feathered with delicate lashes.

"Just a little one. One of your neighbors has complained about the amount of noise coming from your apartment on Saturday nights."

"Can't be us. We always go out on Saturday nights - to the bar down the street. We're not even home 'til after one-thirty."

"Well, I guess the noise is usually later - about two in the morning."

"Impossible. We never even turn on the radio or the TV when we get home. Just turn in for a nice quiet sleep. Are you sure they have the right apartment?"

"I'm pretty sure. I don't think the noise comes from anything like a TV. I think it's... you know ... sort of people sounds?"

"But then it can't be us, because Olaf and I - we don't say a word to one another after we come home." She laughed, winked at me, then hollered up the stairs. "Do we Olaf?" Olaf didn't hear her. "We have more important things to do."

"Well, the neighbors seem to think the noise is coming from this unit. Maybe you could... just sort of be conscious of the problem and try to keep things quiet."

"But of course. We will be as quiet as possible."

I wasn't sure whether the woman was dense or coy. But you have to leave people room to maneuver, I told myself, and headed home. On the way, I wondered how Mrs. Eriksson would look in sneakers.

Two weeks later, Mrs. Neill cornered me in my own apartment just as I was leaving for work. The first faint rays of a pink sunrise glowed on the horizon beyond my doorstep. Mooch was with her. He wound his way around my legs and up the stairs into my living room.

"I should have shut Mooch in the house," she told me. "We used to take him everywhere we went. But we don't bother anymore," She got a big smile on her face, "because he always finds his way home. I hope he doesn't bother you too much."

"Only when I'm trying to sleep. He climbs in the window and jumps down on my stomach."

"You're kidding." She shook her head and put her hand over her eyes.

I laughed. "It's no problem. He makes up for it by coming over every Wednesday night to watch National Geographic. He likes the birds."

"Anything for food or TV."

I put down my briefcase and my purse. "How are things going?"

"Well that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Marcy's still asleep. I didn't want to have to explain with her hanging over my knee."

"Things aren't any better then?"

"No. In fact they're worse. Marcy was asking if we could buy a bed like the Erikssons have - the kind that walks across the floor. Tim and I have started putting Marcy in our bedroom on Saturday night."

I nodded my head but Mrs. Neill wasn't finished. "That's not the end of it though. Now I'm worried about Tim. You see we have to sleep on the floor on Saturday night because we can't fit on Marcy's bed. The floor isn't very comfortable and when we slept there last Saturday, Tim tried to make love to me, and he put his back out. That was three days ago. And it doesn't seem to be getting any better. He's in a lot of pain."

"I see."

Mooch wound his way around my legs again, climbed onto my upright briefcase.

"It would probably help Tim out a lot if he could just get a proper sleep in his own bed every night. He'll be just about better this Saturday and he'll have to sleep on the floor again."

My briefcase toppled over, catching my ankle. A sharp pain rocketed up my leg so I screamed at Mooch, telling him - more or less - to go out and make babies. He darted for the door.

When I had finished hopping around, I turned back to Mary. "I'll talk to Mrs. Eriksson again, but maybe you could do something to let them know they're disturbing you. Maybe you could try banging your pots and pans right next to the wall every time they wake you up."

"I'll think about that. Only problem is, it'll scare Marcy."

This time when I went to the Erikssons' place, I wore spiked hiking boots.

Mrs. Eriksson wasn't ready for bed yet. She was dressed and her husband was out for the evening. Mooch who had been following me, flashed past my legs when Mrs. Eriksson opened the door. He headed for the living room and began to meow in front of the television. Mrs. Eriksson turned it on for him and he settled down on the floor to watch.

She chatted effervescently in her thick Scandinavian accent, made me a cup of coffee, then lounged coquettishly on the love seat across the room. Low light from a floor lamp cast a triangular shadow behind her.

I took my time but eventually, I got around to her noisy bed. "Do you remember some of my tenants complained about the noise coming from your apartment?"

"Why yes, I do. I hope the noise isn't continuing to bother them."

"I'm afraid it is."

"I can't imagine whatever could be causing the problem. This whole thing is really strange... once a week on a Saturday night?"

Mooch began to meow piteously and Mrs. Eriksson got up and headed for the fridge.

"What's wrong with Mooch?" I asked.

"It's the food commercials," she replied in her heavily accented voice. "Haven't you ever noticed? Every time he sees food on TV, he figures he needs something to eat."

Mooch rubbed against her legs as she sprayed whipped cream from a can into a saucer, and set the saucer in front of the TV.

When she returned to the couch, I explained: "According to what I'm told, the problem is that you and your husband are too noisy when you make love."

Her eyes grew wide and she giggled. "That's it? I wondered if it possibly could be. Yes, Olaf and I do enjoy ourselves. And we like to make love when we have plenty of time. That's why we always choose Saturday night. Are you married Lois?"

"Not any more."

"Well, I would like to help you out. Just in case you get married again. When you are in bed, you should make lots of noise and bounce quite a bit. Men like this."

"I'll remember that. In the meantime, Mrs. Neill says her husband has put his back out and it won't get better because they have to sleep on the floor every Saturday night."

"Why would they have to do that?"

"Their little girl has her bedroom right behind yours. You guys make so much noise on Saturday nights that they move Marcy into their bedroom."

"Hum... a sore back? Well, I can't help that, but no need for their love life to suffer. Send Mrs. Neill over to see me. I can give her lots of good advice."

"I don't think she wants advice. She wants you to make love on the floor and to stick cotton batten in your mouth while you're doing it."

Mrs. Eriksson laughed. "Olaf and I could move our bed into the living room... a show-piece, right?"

"Good idea. Sell tickets,"

Oo-oo, did I really say that?

A few weeks later, Mrs. Mussel (who shared a wall with the Neills, but not the Erikssons) dropped by my unit to pay me a visit. I knew something was on her mind.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Mrs. Mussel?"

"Do you have time?" she asked.

"Probably not," I conceded "but you seem to be worried about something."

"Maybe we could just sit down for a minute."

"That sounds like an excellent idea."

As we passed through the living room she fingered the numerous pictures of my two grown kids and asked how they were.

When I told her they were fine, she breathed a deep sigh. "If only my daughter wasn't so far away. I never get to see my grandchildren."

I nodded, put the kettle on to boil and told her my meeting would wait. We talked quietly for half an hour and sipped a cup of tea.

Eventually, and ever so casually she mentioned the purpose of her visit.

"It's not that I want to complain. It's just that I have trouble sleeping, so when I finally nod off, it's important that I stay that way. For the last three weeks I've been hearing this terrible crashing. Sounds like pots and pans coming from the Neill's place every Saturday night."

I nodded.

"First, I thought they were fighting - nice young couple. But I don't think that's what's going on." She looked at me, hoping for an explanation.

"No. They're not fighting Mrs. Mussel and they are a nice young couple. I have to tell you that I'm to blame for the noise. I'll see it doesn't happen again, so you don't have to worry about losing your sleep anymore."

She beamed from ear to ear. "Great. I was worrying all week when I realized I had to talk to you." She bounced out of her seat and headed for the door.

"And that nice little girl... I'm so glad they're not fighting with one another."

She stopped and thought for a minute. "Of course, I hope you realize. If this continues, I'll have to do something about it. I can't just sit and loose sleep. I might have to hand in my notice next month. You wouldn't mind, would you?"

"Of course, I would, but you do what you have to."

She was gone within thirty seconds, bustling enthusiastically. I watched from my balcony as she headed toward the front of the building. Mooch picked up her trail, nipping at butterflies as he followed.

Mrs. Neill showed up that evening with her rent cheque. When I heard the doorbell ring, I turned off the TV and headed down the stairs to answer it.

"Hello Mary," I greeted her with forced enthusiasm.

Mooch followed her through the door. As he passed me on the stairs, I bent down to run my hand along his back. He arched his spine just enough to avoid my touch and headed into the apartment.

Dark half-moons hung below Mrs. Neill's eyes and her smile was kind of haggard. "I don't like doing this," she told me as soon as she stepped inside, "So I decided to get it over with as quickly as possible. This is our rent for next month."

"You're early." I took the cheque, not really looking at it. "How are things going?" I asked.

I heard voices spring to life from the depths of the living room and wondered how come the TV was on again.

"I hope you won't be too upset." She nodded toward the piece of paper. "It's Tim's idea. He said he's not paying a penny more than that this month. He said if we have to move out of our bedroom, we should only be paying for a one bedroom apartment."

I looked down at the cheque and read \$450 instead of the expected \$600. "I see. \$450. Well... that might be enough if you don't use the shower."

She didn't smile. "I don't like this, either," she added. "Tim's boss told him his back was taking too long to heal. Told him he should get more exercise. Then he laid Tim off. Tim was really happy at first - until he applied for Workman's Compensation. You can't collect

compensation if you put your back out making love - unless, of course, you were doing it on the job."

"I see."

"And if the problem isn't fixed by the end of this coming month, we'll have to move out. We can't afford this place."

I nodded unhappily. She dragged herself out my door and around the building.

When I returned to the living room, I found Mooch sprawled on the couch watching TV. The remote was sitting where I'd left it - on the coffee table.

I went over to the Erikssons' later that evening. Mooch followed me. Mr. Eriksson answered the door, a gruff good-looking man with a slight limp. He called his wife and she floated to the door behind him, dressed in her housecoat again.

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you," I said, "but the problem just isn't going away. You've got to do something Mrs. Eriksson. Like buy a water bed or something."

"Water bed? No. It wouldn't make enough noise. Say, listen. I've been meaning to ask you. I have a friend who writes a column for the Herald. He told me he wants to do a human interest piece on difficult landlords. I asked him if he was interested in one who interfered in people's sex lives. Would you be willing to talk to him? He said an interview with you would really help his article. But don't worry if you don't feel up to it. He can verify what I have to say by talking to the Neill's."

"Let me think about that."

"He thinks we should move out. But I don't know. Olaf likes Mooch a lot."

The clincher came the next day when Mrs. Neill told me that Mooch was visiting with the neighbors two houses down the street and no matter how she tempted him he wouldn't come home.

"I think it's a sign," she said. "Even Mooch doesn't want to live here any more."

Over the next few hours, I did three things. I tried to phone my bank manager to tell him the mortgage payment would be late. He wasn't in. I put an 'apartment for rent' ad in the newspaper. And late in the afternoon, I made an appointment with Jake the real estate agent. He said he'd drop by when he had a few minutes so I could list the sixplex.

Three days passed. Nobody returned my calls or answered my ad - no bank manager, no Jake, no potential renters. And Mooch didn't come by to watch National Geographic on Wednesday night. I was teed off to say the least.

On the following Monday evening, my doorbell rang. When I went to answer it, no one was there. Except Mooch. He was sitting on my balcony, a foot away from the doorbell. My heart leapt but I didn't want to get emotionally involved so I made a few snide comments to him.

A moment later Mrs. Neill appeared, so I held open the screen. Mooch hopped down and snaked into my apartment.

"Did you just ring the doorbell?" I asked her.

"No." She was bursting with enthusiasm. Her cheeks were rosy. The dark circles were gone from her eyes. She was dying to tell me what was going on but she handed me a cheque first.

"That's the rest of our rent for this month," she gushed. "Tim said it was okay for us to pay you."

"That's wonderful," I said. "I can tell my bank manager to stuff it."

"Do you want to know what happened?"

"If you don't mind telling me..."

"Saturday night. Saturday night did it. We went out with the Erikssons and had a wonderful time. Mrs. Eriksson told us all about the book she's thinking about writing. She's going

to call it the Joy of Noisy Sex. Then afterwards, we came home - didn't even have to worry about Marcy because Mrs. Mussel looked after her - for the whole night. In fact, Tim and I ... well two o'clock is kind of a stimulating time of night if you're not worried about anything."

"And Tim's back? Is it okay?"

"It's going to be fine now. He slept in his own bed Saturday. I'm sure everything will be just great."

"You think Marcy is okay in that bedroom then?"

"The Erikssons want us to go out with them again next Saturday - every Saturday. And Mrs. Mussel has Marcy to sleep over when we go out. And the Erikssons assured us, no noise in between - so Tim and I can have our bedroom back on Saturday night."

"I'm thrilled," I said fingering my cheque.

"On top of that, Marcy thinks Mrs. Mussel is great. She can hardly wait to go over and sleep at her place next time...Says Mrs. Mussel has a big cookie jar."

"I'll bet Mrs. Mussel does."

Mrs. Mussel came to see me a couple of weeks later. She arrived five minutes after I told Jake that I didn't want to sell the sixplex after all. When I answered the door, her face was deadly serious.

Obviously, Mooch didn't share Mrs. Mussel's concern. He was busy following an attractive torby cat along the fence, sniffing beneath its tail.

After minor preliminaries, Mrs. Mussel informed me, "There's a lot of noise coming from the Neill's place about two o'clock in the morning every Saturday."

"You're kidding."

"Well, it's no big problem except I'm worried about Marcy because that's when she sleeps over. She says she can hear the bed in her Mom and Dad's apartment walking around."

"How can a bed walk around?"

"Have you considered the possibility this building has ghosts?"



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